# QUESTION

Concerning The

# LAVVFULNES

OR

# UNLAVVFULNES

OF

# SWEARING

Under The

# GOSPEL,

Stated, and Considered of:

For the Satisfaction of such as desire to scan the Thing in the Weight of God's *Spirit*, and to see the true and clear Determination of it in His *un-erring Light*.

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By *Isaac Penington* the Younger.

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*London*, Printed for *Robert Wilson*, at the sign of the *Spread-Eagle* and *Windmill*, in *Martins Le Grand*, [illegible]

Syn. 7. 66. 48

The GREAT

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# The great Question, concerning the *Lawfulness* or *Unlawfulness* of Swearing under the Gospel, stated and considered of, &c.

Quest.

WHether it be lawful for Christians (who know Christ, the Substance of all the Shadows under the Law, and are in the New Covenant) to Swear upon weighty occasions, as it was lawful for the Jews to do under the Old Covenant? or, Whether Christ alloweth his Disciples to swear in solemn Cases, as Moses did allow his Disciples?

*Answ.* For the clearing of this weighty Controversie to all such, as singly desire to know the Truth (as it is in Jesus) in this particular, that their hearts may bow to Him therein, and not be overtaken with the Reasonings and Subtilties of the Carnal Mind (which never knew nor can know the Power, but hath alwayes been, and still is setting up dead Images, of God's Truths and of his Worship, out of the Power) these few things following would be considered of. First, *What an Oath is*, or, *The nature of a right and true Oath under the Law.* Secondly, *The ground or occasion of its Institution.* Thirdly, *The Cases wherein an Oath was to be used.* Fourthly, *The proper end and service of an Oath.* Fifthly, *The suitableness of its nature to its end and service.* Lastly, *The persons to whom the use of an Oath was proper in it self, and intended and allowed by God; and whether there be any persons to whom it is not proper, and to whom the Lord doth not allow it?* This last is the main, and will

ſelf determine the thing; but yet a brief Conſideration of the former may not be unprofitable, to make way for a clearer leading and inſight into it.

Firſt, As touching *an Oath, what it is*, or *the nature of it*. A true and lawful Oath under the Law, was an Engagement or Bond upon the Soul (*Numb.* 30. 2.) by the Name of the Lord (*Deut.* 10. 20.) to the ſpeaking of Truth in things *affirmed*, and to the performance of Truth in things *promiſed*. It was as a Seal to bind fallen man (man fallen from the Truth, from the Uprightneſs) to Truth in his *Words* and *Promiſes*, either to God or man. This is the nature & uſe of *an Oath*, to wit, to bind the Soul to Truth, to be ſuch an Engagement upon the Soul, as, if there be any fear of God there, it cannot but dread to break, knowing that *the Lord will not hold him guiltleſs, that taketh his Name in vain.*

Secondly, *The ground or occaſion of an Oath*, is the Fall of Man from Truth, from Innocency, from the Uprightneſs which engaged him to Truth before his Fall. This made the *Jews* ſtand in need of this Bond under the Law, in their Purpoſes and Promiſes towards God; and the ſame thing likwiſe made them ſtand in need of it one from another, to Ratifie and Confirm Truth between them.

Thirdly, *The Caſes wherein an Oath was to be uſed*, which were chiefly theſe four.

1. In caſe of a Promiſe or Vow to God,
2. In caſe of Promiſe to man,

That the Truth, Integrity, and plain Intention of the Heart might ſtand, and there might be no departing therefrom, in the thing promiſed, either to God or man; an Oath in that ſtate was found uſeful to bind the Soul thereto.

3. In

3. In case of Pronouncing or Declaring the Truth of a Thing, which was weighty, that there might be a clear and satisfactory ground of belief.

4. In case of Controversie between Parties, where the Controversie could not be determined, but by taking the Confession of the one Party for Truth; there that Party was to seal his Confession with an Oath, and so the other to rest satisfied therewith, and the Controversie thereupon end.

Fourthly, *The end of an Oath*, which is, for final Confirmation, and avoiding of all further Strife and Contention about the Thing sworn to. By binding the Thing (promised or affirmed) with an Oath, the thing is confirmed; and now there is no more strife in the heart concerning the thing, if relating to God, or between man and man in things relating to them, but the striving nature is bound down by the Oath of God, wherewith the Thing is ratified, and so the Doubt and Uncertainty removed, and the Contest ended. Thus of right it ought to be, and is where the Oath is forcible and in its proper service.

Fifthly, *The suitableness of its nature to the end aimed at by it.* Man out of the Christian Life, can go no further, than to engage himself by the fear and dread of that God, whom he professeth to worship and serve, and who cannot but be jealous of his Name and Honour, and ready to vindicate the taking of it in vain. Man under the Law, could not bind himself to God, in any promise or service more than thus; nor can there be any greater Bond or Seal of Truth given by one man to another, in the fallen state, than this. And he that will venture to break this, what but Deceit and Treachery can be expected from him? insomuch as no other

Engage-

Engagement from him can be of weight, he hereby manifesting the want of that in his mind and spirit, whereupon all ties are to fasten.

Sixtly, *The persons to whom the use of an Oath was proper and lawful, and for whom it was instituted; and whether there be any persons to whom it is not proper and lawful, and for whose use it was not instituted?*

To find out this distinctly and truly, we must consider the several Conditions of Man since the Creation, and observe to which of those it is useful and proper in it self, and allowed by God; and to which it is not useful in it self, nor allowed by God.

There have been four Estates or Conditions of Mankind since the Creation.

1. *An Estate of Innocency*, an Estate of Integrity, of Purity, of Righteousness, wherein man could not lye or deceive; but his Promises to God, and his words to men, must needs be *Yea* and *Amen:* for it was impossible to man, who was made in God's Image (which is Truth) to lye or deceive, until the Deceit entred him, and drew him out of the Truth.

2. There was (and still is) *an Estate of deep Captivity*, wherein this Truth and Innocency was wholly lost, and man wholly corrupted in his spirit and nature, and wholly degenerated from God. This was the Estate of the Heathen, who knew not God generally, nor desired after Him, but walked in the vanity of their minds, and were given up to their own hearts lusts. Yet among some of these the Eternal Principle of Life was stirring, which did check them, and offer to guide them out of this Estate, which they that hearkened unto, did not remain in the Fall with the rest, but felt the Power of that, which reproved and checked them,

circum-

circumcising their Hearts, and, in their Obedience thereto, justifying them in their Consciences before God.

3. There was *an Estate of shadowy Redemption*, which was not the true Estate of Redemption it self, or they the true People which were to be redeemed, but a shadow of it the Redemtion, a shadow of the Redeemed People, a shadow of the Way and Path of Life, wherein were Figures of the Heavenly Substance, the Heavenly People, the Heavenly Things, the Heavenly Inheritance, the Heavenly Food, &c. But all these Figures in and under the Law, were not the true Heavenly and Invisible Things themselves, but outward and visible Signs and Representations of them.

4. There was, and, blessed be the Lord, now at length (after the great, long and dark night of Apostacy) again is brought forth *an Estate of True Redemption*, wherein the Soul is brought back from the Death, from the Captivity, from the Fall, from the Deceit, and from the Shadows into the Truth, into the pure Life, into the Innocency, into the Uprightness; wherein Christ (the Power of God) is witnessed, and the Soul new formed in his pure Image, and become a new Creature, having a new Eye, a new Ear, a new Heart, a new Nature, a new Life and Spirit (in the newness of which Life, it is to live and walk) a new Course and Conversation, a new Place to walk and have its Conversation in, even in that very Heaven, from whence it looks for the Saviour; wherein also all old things, which came in by the Fall, and all the old shadows of the Law are to pass away, and in this state all things to become new. And this is not only to be expected in the perfection of this state, but belongs (in its measure

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and degree) to the very beginning of it: for even ſo ſoon as a man is engrafted into Chriſt, and can be ſaid to be in Chriſt, even then he is a new Creature, and all things then begin to become new unto him, and he is then to begin, departing from all the old things, both of the Natural or Heatheniſh ſtate, and of the Jewiſh ſtate, until he hath left them all behind. The Apoſtle ſaith expreſly, *If any man be in Chriſt, he is a new Creature: Old things are paſſed away; all things are become new.* Chriſt, the Lord and Maſter of all Believers, who himſelf was not of the World, calleth all His Diſciples and Followers out of the World. How out of the World? doth He call them from having any being or commerce in the Earth, or in the World? Nay, not ſo, but to come out of the *evil* and *corrupt ſtate, practices* & *wayes* of the World; out of the *Earthly Wayes* of the Heathens, out of the *Earthly Ordinances* and *Obſervations* of the Jewes; yea, even out of every thing in both, which was not of the Father, but of the World; and this made them a gazing ſtock to both, and the ſcorn and hatred of both, where-ever they came.

Theſe are the four Eſtates or Conditions of Mankind ſince the Creation: in one of which, all men that ever were, have been to be found; and according to the Eſtate and Condition wherein Man is found, is the Law of God to him, and His Requirings of him.

Now let any man, in the Fear of the Lord God, weigh and conſider, to which ſort or ſorts of theſe an Oath was uſeful in it ſelf, and allowed by God, and to which not. Was it uſeful in the Innocent ſtate? or, did God appoint it there, when man could not but ſpeak Truth? or, is it uſeful in the Redeemed Eſtate, where a greater

a greater Bond is received, and professedly held forth, than the Innocency of Mans Nature was? Is not Christ the Truth, the Substance? Is not he that is in Him, the New Creature? Were not all the *Oaths* and *Shadows* of the Law, to last till Christ the *Substance* came? Is not this the Bond of the Gospel? and doth not this seal Truth, and keep to Truth more firmly, than the *Oath* under the Law could? And the greater Bond being come, doth not the lesser Bond (which signified it) flee away and vanish, and the use of it now become both needless and unlawful? Men may reason subtilly, and perswade strongly against the Truth, but we know certainly and infallibly in the Light of the Lord, that the use of an Oath was not for Man in Innocency, nor for Man under the power and vertue of the Redemption by Christ (which brings Man back into the Truth, into the Innocency, and into that Life and Strength, which preserves in the Truth and Innocency) but for fallen Man, for Man erred from the Truth and Covenant of God: And it is very manifest to us, that for a Disciple of Christ, who hath received the Law from his Lips against *Swearing*, to be brought back again *to Swearing* (the bond of Man in the fallen state, and under the Law) is no lesse than a denial of Christ, who is his Life and Redeemer out of the fallen state, and who also is the Substance, which ends the Oaths: and he that hath ever known the *pure Power* of His Life, and received the *pure Law* thereof in the clear Openings of his Spirit, must not depart from thence, from the feeling of that, into the fleshly reasonings, into consultations with the fleshly-wise part, which will be sure to give such Interpretations of Scriptures, as may avoid the Crosse; but keep to that Power which

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begotten, unto that Principle wherein he was begotten; and there he shall never be able to get beyond the *Yea* and *Amen* in Christ, beyond the Confessing of the Truth in the Presence and Life of it, which is the end and substance of *Swearing* under the Law: and therefore the Apostle *Paul*, who several Times, and in several Cases relates to the Prophecies of the Prophets (who foretold of things under the Gospel, in Law-phrases) renders the word *Confess*, instead of *Swear*, as may appear by comparing, *Rom.* 14. 11. and *Philip.* 2. 11. with *Isa.* 45. 23. That which the Law called *Swearing*, the Gospel calls *Confessing* (each of them speaking of the same thing, in the proper dialect of each:) which Confessing in the Life, in the Truth, in the renewed Principle, is the weight and substance of that, whereof the Oath was but a shadow. For what is the substance and intent of an Oath? is not the intent of it to bind to the speaking or performing of Truth? And what is it that binds? is it the shadow, or the substance? is it the words of an Oath, or the sense and weight of the thing upon the spirit? It was not the *form* of an Oath, but the *weight* and *substance* hid underneath, which bound the Jew under the Law: and if there be more weight and substance in the *Yea* and *Nay* of a Disciple under the Gospel, it must needs be more binding to them, and hath also more true ground of satisfaction in it (to other Christians at least) than a *Jews* or *Heathens* swearing: yea, and if the Men of the World would but freely speak their hearts, it would be acknowledged to be of more weight with them also. Who of those who have observed and known our Conversation, and upright speaking and behaviour for these many years (both towards the various Rulers and Authorities

thorities of the [illegible] and also towards all men of all sorts) would not prefer our *Yea* and *Nay* before the Oaths of others.

Object. *But though a Christian may not swear in relation to himself, yet why may he not swear in relation to the satisfaction of others, seeing God himself swore in that respect, who was as much in the Power and Virtue of that Life which binds from Swearing, as a Christian can be?*

*Answ.* 1. God (being not bound Himself by the Laws, wherewith He binds the Creature) may either Himself, or by an Instrument (in his immediate Life and Power) do that which the Creature hath not liberty from Him to do: but that is no warrant in general, but the Disciple is particularly to eye the Rule from his Master CHRIST JESUS (who is Lord over the Household of Faith, and who was as faithful in all His House as Lord, as *Moses* the servant was in his House) by whom the same God, who once allowed Oaths to the *Jews*, hath now wholly forbidden *Swearing*. And let the Disciple diligently and faithfully eye the Laws of the New Covenant (which are written by, and received from the ingrafted Word of Faith in the heart) he shall find Oaths excluded there as a part of the Old Covenant, even as a *literal* and *shadowy* Confirmation of Truth among the Jews, under *Moses* his Dispensation, for the time of the Law: but the *Grace* and *Truth* it self is the substance, and the *Faith received* is the seal of Truth under the Gospel, both towards God and man.

*Answ.* 2. A Christian may not swear in relation to the satisfaction of others. Because he is to hold forth his Light, his Life, his Principle in the eye of the world. He is to testifie to the Worth and Excellency of it, that

it is a greater and firmer Bond to him (both towards God and man) than any Oaths either of the Heathen, or of the Jews can be. Now his entring into their way of Confirmation of things, which is short of his own, is an undervaluing and disparagement of the worth and weight of that Principle of Truth, which God hath given him and raised up in him: It is indeed a denying of it: for, entring into the Law-bond, is a laying of the Gospel-bond by, and an offering of that as a Bond, which indeed once was so, but is now excluded by the Law of Faith from being a Bond any longer, and hath lost its vertue. And if men would but open their eyes, they might easily see how little Oaths bind, and how unprofitable they are to the end and use for which they are intended: but the *Yea* and *Amen* in Christ (the Principle of Life) cannot be broken, but he that abides in Him, must perform the *Yea* and *Amen*, which is firm in Him.

*Answ.* 3. A Christian or Disciple may not swear under the Gospel, Because Christ hath brought in Confession or Affirmation of the Truth, from the Principle of his Life, instead of Oaths: which is made good, not only by the Apostle *Paul*'s rendring of *Swearing* in the Law-time, *Confessing*, in the fulfilling of it under the Gospel; but also by Christ's bringing in the *Yea*, *Yea*, and *Nay*, *Nay*, instead of the Law's Swearing. In the Jew the Oath was the Seal or Confirmation under the Law: in the Disciple, who is in the Life, and hath learned the Truth of Christ the Life, the *Yea*, *Yea*, the *Nay*, *Nay*, is appointed him by Christ instead of the Oath. And though the subtilty and fleshly wisdom strive hard, to wrest that place out of the hands of the Simplicity, yet they shall never be able to do it; but he that looks

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on it with a single eye in the Light of that Spirit wherein it was wrote, shall plainly see Christ's drift to be to take away the shadow, even to abolish that use of *Swearing* which was proper and allowed to the Jews under the Law, and to bring the Confession or Denial of the Thing, the *Yea, Yea,* and *Nay, Nay,* (from the Gospel-spirit and Principle in the Disciple) in the stead of it: Which, to make more manifest to the honest, simple, and naked heart, which is willing to take up the Will and Truth of God in every thing, with all the crosses that attend it, let these few Lines following be uprightly considered of.

First, That slight, trivial and frequent Oaths were not allowed under the Law, but forbidden by the Law, as a taking of Gods Holy and Dreadful Name in vain.

Secondly, That though vain Oaths were then forbidden, yet solemn Oaths, weighty Oaths (such as were needful and useful to the thing intended) were allowed under the Law. So in all those cases before expressed, Oaths were allowed and justifiable, so that they were but careful to perform them, and did not forswear themselves.

Thirdly, Christ brings in an Exception against the use of this lawful Swearing under the Law, as the word *But* doth plainly signifie, and forbiddeth Swearing wholly, altogether, or at all. The Law saith, *Thou shalt not forswear thy self* (that's the substance of what the Law forbids: it allows *Swearing*, but forbids *Forswearing*) But I say unto you, Ye shall not only avoid *Forswearing*, but *Swearing* also, and that wholly or altogether: *But I say unto you, Swear not at all.*

Fourthly, Christ brings in another thing instead of Swearing (a thing far more sutable to the truth, plain-

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ness and simplicity of the Gospel) which is Confessing the thing, or speaking the thing in truth, just as it is, either by way of Affirmation or Denyal: *but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay.*

And there is liberty enough left to a Disciple, to satisfie any man concerning the truth of a thing by a Confession, as much as by an Oath: For is it not full as weighty, under the Gospel to confess the Presence of God, or that He is Witness, or that we speak the thing in his Fear, and in the feeling of his Life and Power, as it was under the Law to swear *by his Life, by his Fear, by his Power*, or the like? Is not the Confessing of God by a Christian, of more weight, than the Swearing by Him from a Jew or Heathen? O Nations and Powers of the Earth, seek Truth, seek Righteousness, and do not set up a Form or Image of things in your own wills (and according to your own wisdom and inventions) above the Power of God.

And let it be duely considered, whether the Powers of this Nation deal kindly with the Lord, in exacting an Oath from his People, who not in the leath disaffection to them, but only in fidelity of Conscience to Christ their Lord and Master, cannot but refuse it.

The Question is, concerning their Fidelity and Obedience to the King, that is the thing which an Oath is required to ratifie and confirm. Now the Swearing it self (or formal taking of an Oath) is of little value; but to be obedient, to be faithful, is the thing of value. The case then stands thus: The Lord hath so formed them, that they cannot but be faithful and obedient. The Lord hath raised up that Principle in them, which cannot hurt the King or any man, nor cannot stand by and see him or any man hurt, without endeavouring to

prevent

prevent it. Here is their ſtrength of performing good and avoiding evil; and their *Yea*, and *Nay* from this Principle, is the beſt Security which they can poſſibly give to any man (and he who hath thus formed them in the *pure Principle* of his Life, hath likewiſe forbidden them to ſwear) But this cannot be accepted for want of the other Confirmation, to wit, *of Swearing*, which came in by the Fall, and was allowed among the ſhadows of the Law, but is forbidden by the Goſpel.

Now, O King, ſhall not God's People be faithful and obedient to the Lord as well as to thee? ſhall they not be true to the Principle of Life, wherein they are begotten and brought forth, in the Love and Good-will to all, and out of Enmity to any? Hath God raiſed up in them a Principle which cannot deceive, and will not the *Yea* and *Nay* of that ſerve (after ſo much experience, through ſo many changes) but they muſt either break Chriſt's Command, and hazard their Souls, or elſe loſe their Liberties and Eſtates?

O that men would wait on the Lord, for his pure Fear to be written on their hearts by the finger of His Spirit, that they might come out of the fleſhly wiſdom into the womb of the Eternal Wiſdom, from whence our Principle came; that they might be able to ſee and juſtifie the Purity, Righteouſneſs, Nobility and Worth of it, and that they might feel its ſecurity from all that is out of the Good-will, out of the Love, out of the Life, and out of the Peace, that ſo there might be an end of all Strife, Rebellion, Heart-burnings, Plots, and all manner of Wickedneſs and Ungodlineſs, which have no place in it, but daily waſte and wither where it is ſown and grows, even till they come to an end, and

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all Righteousness and pure Innocency fill the room and place which they had, both in the heart and mind within, and in the life and conversation outwardly.

And let every one that nameth the Name of the Lord, depart from Iniquity, and look well to his goings: for the darkness of the thick night of Apostacy is already past, and the True Light now again shineth. Blessed is the Eye which seeth it, and the Heart which is established in it, in the midst of those terrible and dreadful shakings and confusions, which must not end here, but go over all Nations. O that this Nation could once bow to it, that it might be happy, and its Rents and Breaches healed for ever.

THE END.